Oxford House

"AN IDEA BASED ON A SOUND SYSTEM
FOR RECOVERING ALCOHOLICS TO HELP THEMSELVES"

HOUSING, FELLOWSHIP, SELF-RELIANCE
FOR RECOVERING ALCOHOLICS

OXFORD HOUSE, INC., is a non-profit corporation which will provide Charters, free of charge, to recovering alcoholics who want to provide housing for themselves and other recovering alcoholics.

Oxford House

(Founded October, 1975)

1219 Fidler Lane. Silver Spring. Maryland 20910

Dear Reader:

This booklet is about Oxford House, where recovering alcoholics assume full responsibility for their own housing, and provide a stable, democratically-operated environment for living the program of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Oxford House is based on an idea, the idea that recovering alcoholics can provide their own housing. Oxford House provides a system for putting the idea into practice. In brief, the system consists of separate, autonomous, democratically self-operated houses loosely tied together as part of a non-profit corporation, supported and strengthened by Oxford House traditions, which are constant reminders of the members' need for the program of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Oxford House works. During the first year of operation, two Oxford Houses demonstrated this.

At Oxford House, the members take pride in not drinking. They have found new friends with a common purpose. They are no longer lonely. Shattered home lives begin to be reassembled as the recovering alcoholic learns to share responsibility. Group conscience and group decision encourage the member who has long resisted higher authority.

The members of Oxford House have found a supplement to Alcoholics Anonymous which is good for them. They want to share their find with any group of recovering alcoholics anywhere. This booklet gives further details. If, after reading it, you want to start an Oxford House in your town, let us know.

Sincerely,

John V. O'Neill

John V. O'Neill

James Spellman

James Spellman

J. Paul Molloy

J. Paul Molloy

Richard Palmer

Richard Palmer

E. Whit Holden

E. Whit Holden

Directors of Oxford House, Inc.

Oxford House

"AN IDEA BASED ON A SOUND SYSTEM
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SYSTEM -

a non-profit corporation providing individual charters to recovering alcoholics who want to join together to form democratically-run and self-supported housing consistent with the Oxford House concept, system, and traditions.

THE OXFORD HOUSE SYSTEM

There is a frequent saying among Oxford House members that "Oxford House has no rules except 'Don't drink.'" For the most part, that saying is true. However, it does overstate the facts.

While rules at Oxford House are kept at a minimum, there are nevertheless rules. Unfortunately, it is impossible for any organization to function without having some system or procedures. The basic rule for all Oxford Houses is that they must operate on a democratic basis. Each member of the House has one vote. A majority rules except in the case of accepting a new recovering alcoholic for membership in which case 80% of the current membership must vote its approval.

The discussion which follows spells out the Oxford House System. It draws upon the experience of the existing Oxford Houses and tells any recovering alcoholic who is interested (1) how to start an Oxford House; (2) how to make an Oxford House run smoothly; (3) how to manage the money in an Oxford House.

Oxford House, Inc., is the umbrella organization for all Oxford Houses. Any group of recovering alcoholics who want to form an Oxford House must obtain a charter from Oxford House, Inc. The charter confers on Oxford House the benefits of being a part of a non-profit corporation which can offer the experience and guidance necessary for making an Oxford House work.

Any two or more recovering alcoholics can apply for an Oxford House charter. Oxford House, Inc., has no hard and fast rules as to the length of sobriety required of recovering alcoholics who want to charter a new house. Charter applications are considered by the Board of Directors on a case-by-case basis. As a general rule, however, several members of any charter group should have several months of solid sobriety.

Obtaining A Charter

Two or more recovering alcoholics can apply for a charter from Oxford House, Inc., by completing an application for a charter or simply writing a letter containing the pertinent information to Oxford House, Inc., 1219 Fidler Lane, Silver Spring, Maryland 20910. Pertinent information would include answers to the following questions:

1. Names of proposed charter members.

2. Length of sobriety for each proposed charter member.

3. The plans that the proposed charter group has for renting, leasing, or purchasing a house.

4. The number of beds contemplated for use in the proposed new Oxford House.

5. The anticipated charge per man per week which will be needed to make the house self-supporting.

Once the Board of Directors of Oxford House, Inc., have reviewed the application or letter from the prospective charter members, they will either issue a charter or suggest additional steps for the prospective members to take in order to obtain a charter. A charter will be issued if, in the judgement of a majority of the Board of Directors, the proposed new Oxford House would have a reasonable chance of success. In some cases, the Board may issue a charter prior to the actual acquisition of housing by the charter members. In such a case, the charter will be issued upon the condition that the charter members obtain suitable housing within a specified period of time. (See Appendix C for a sample charter application).

Obtaining A House

The Oxford House philosophy is one that relies on expanding capacity rather than limiting the length of time that a member can live in a House. To achieve sufficient capacity for providing enough rooms for all recovering alcoholics who want to live in an Oxford House, it has been necessary to date to lease houses. In the future, it may be possible for some Oxford Houses to enter into a purchase arrangement, thereby achieving the benefits of ownership of property. For the short term, however, it is recommended that any new Oxford House first enter into a lease arrangement so as to thoroughly test the viability of their endeavor.

The size and cost of a suitable house to begin an Oxford House depends more on what is available than any specific criteria. The charter members who are looking for a suitable house should make certain that any prospective house can be occupied without violating local zoning or health and safety laws. This does not mean that an Oxford House should not be considered simply as residential property. Most jurisdictions in the country do not have specific ordinances which relate directly to an Oxford House-type situation. Most group housing ordinances, if they exist at all, are geared to highly-institutionalized situations. Most commercial zoning ordinances, i.e., rooming houses, apartments, or hotels or motels, are inappropriate for the Oxford House situation. As a factual matter, Oxford House occupants most closely resemble an ordinary residence. If the charter members have any doubt as to how their particular jurisdiction will view an Oxford House, they should face the matter directly and clear their occupancy with local housing authorities. Oxford House, Inc., will be willing to provide any assistance it can in persuading local authorities to

treat Oxford House the same as it would treat any other residential property within its jurisdiction.

Common sense should be used in selecting any house which is to be used as an Oxford House. It should have adequate plumbing, adequate kitchen facilities, adequate laundry facilities, a sufficient number of bedrooms, and a pleasant common living space. In addition, the area should be surveyed to determine to what extent parking of automobiles may cause a problem.

The amount of rent that a new group can afford depends on the number of beds which the house can hold. The reasonable charge for members will depend on the economics of the locality where the house is to be located. The first Oxford House (Oxford House-Silver Spring) charges $30 per week, or $120 per month. That house has a monthly rental of $700 and holds 13 members. As it worked out, a somewhat lower rental could have been charged the members in Silver Spring and still have met the monthly rental payment, the utility bills, and the food bill. The members of that house, however, chose to let a small surplus accumulate in their treasury so that an additional house could be opened in Washington, D. C. The Silver Spring house provided over $2,000 in start-up money for Oxford House-Washington.

As a general rule, it is easy to acquire furniture for a house at little or no expense. One exception to this general rule is beds. Based on experience to date, it is safe to assume that beds must be purchased and therefore constitute a significant item of start-up cost for the new house. Each twin-sized box spring and mattress set costs from $90 to $120 per unit. Beds constitute a significant part of start-up cost. Other start-up costs generally include one month's rent in advance and often a security deposit equal to one month's rent.

While start-up costs can run as low as $800 (as in the case of Oxford House-Silver Spring), they can run as high as $2400 (as in the case of Oxford House-Washington). Money for start-up costs can sometimes be borrowed from other existing Oxford Houses. Such money is then repaid according to a definite schedule-usually $50 or $100 per month. Another source for funds in order to start-up an Oxford House can come from within the community itself. One or more individuals wishing to start an Oxford House may lend the Oxford House the necessary money. If so, they should be repaid in accordance with a schedule agreed upon at the time of the loan. There are also members of Alcoholics Anonymous who are willing to loan money if they are given the assurance of a pay-back on a regular basis.

Membership

The charter members of a new Oxford House consititute a basic core of membership for the House. Once the house has started, the charter members will generally want to bring in enough new members so as to fill all the available beds. The higher the

occupancy rate, the lower the rent which must be paid by each Oxford House member.

One of the requirements under an Oxford House charter is that new members must be approved by 80% of the existing members in a particular house. 80% approval is required because it is extremely important that all of the members living in an Oxford House feel comfortable with any newcomer. As a practical matter, existing Oxford Houses have denied membership to very few individuals. Most members of Oxford House keep their memory green and few applicants are excluded from membership. Those who are excluded generally are excluded because there are no beds available. A waiting list is maintained, but generally is of little value since when a person needs a room, he must get one immediately.

To date, membership in Oxford House has been limited to men. There is nothing in the Oxford House charter which forces such a restriction. Given suitable accommodations, both men and women could be admitted to the same Oxford House. At the present time, plans are underway to open an Oxford House which will be exclusively for recovering women alcoholics. Each house must decide for itself whether to be exclusively for men; exclusively for women, or for both men and women.

Once a house is established, applicants for membership will exceed the space available. At that point in time, consideration should be given to opening a new Oxford House using some of the current members as a core group for the new house. In the beginning, the charter members of an Oxford House should make themselves known to quarter-way houses, detoxification units, and the AA groups within the area. Included among those items which should be stressed are that the house is democratically-run; it is self-supporting; drinking is not permitted; and that both new and not-so-new recovering alcoholics are welcome to come and live at the house as long as they do not drink and as long as they pay their rent.

Rules

Alcoholics by nature seem to dislike rules. There is only one must applicable to all Oxford Houses, i.e. membership is conditioned on not drinking. It is impossible for a house of recovering alcoholics to stay sober if even one person is permitted to drink. The use or possession of alcohol by any member in an Oxford House is automatic grounds for expulsion. The use of alcohol outside an Oxford House by a member living in an Oxford House may result in immediate expulsion. At a minimum, such a situation requires placing the member on probation. Once on probation, a member is automatically expelled if he drinks again.

The rule relating to the use of alcohol grows out of common sense. That rule is the only rule considered mandatory once a group of recovering alcoholics have received an Oxford House charter. Other rules will tend to evolve from the membership of the house itself. Those rules should come into being only if they are absolutely necessary. The fewer the rules, the more likely it will be that a house will be successful. Different houses will tend to have different rules. For example, Oxford House-Silver Spring has a rule which requires unanimous consent before any pet can be brought onto the premises. Oxford House-Washington has two cats and it will probably require unanimous consent before either cat could be evicted.

In many alcoholic rehabilitation units, there are rules covering a multitude of activities. Those rules include curfew hours; clean-up details; mandatory attendance at AA meetings; and other rules almost inherent in institutional living. Oxford House is not an institution. It is more analagous to a family situation or a college fraternity. There should be no rules with respect to curfew or mandatory attendance at AA meetings. Certain rules may be required to assure an equitable distribution of the work in keeping the house clean and at times there may be the need for rules to keep some individuals from disrupting other individuals.

Since the success of an Oxford House depends on having enough income to meet expenses, it is important that members pay rent in a timely manner. Rules may be required which force the eviction of members who do not keep their rent up to date. All members should be encouraged to pay their rent at least one week in advance.

Officers

For Oxford House to run successfully on a democratic basis, it must have certain elected officers. It is part of the Oxford House tradition to make sure that officers do not become so entrenched that other members of the house do not have an equal voice in its management. Therefore, it is an Oxford House tradition that no officer shall serve longer than six months in the same office for one continuous period of time. All officers are but the trusted servants of the entire membership. The number of officers may vary from house to house. Oxford House-Silver Spring and Oxford House-Washington have the following elected officers:

President
Treasurer
Comptroller
Secretary
Coordinator

A full description of the duties of these officers is contained in Appendix F. The election of both a treasurer and comptroller emphasizes the importance each Oxford Houses places on money management. The two officers are able to divide rent

collection and help each other with the payment of bills.

Meetings

It is important to have a meeting at least once a week. After some experimenting, a house will find the particular hour or half-hour which is most convenient for most of its members. A meeting should be used to consider new applications for membership in the Oxford House; any problems affecting any members in the house; general complaints about maintenance of the house; projects or proposals for tasks to be undertaken by the house; and the current financial status of the house. A sample meeting report is contained in Appendix E.

The most difficult meetings of all in an Oxford House involve those meetings where the dismissal of a member is to be considered. Such meetings should take place within 24 hours after an individual has been thought to be drinking. The individual should be confronted and the matter discussed openly. If the drinking occurred off the premises and represents a first offense for the individual, the group should consider whether outright dismissal is advisable or whether the member should be placed on probation. If the member is placed on probation, the terms of his probation should be made clear from the start and any violation of those terms should result in automatic expulsion. Each house must determine the exact procedures it will use for dismissing a member. Some houses have decided to use three of the elected officers as a screening committee for determining if an individual has violated the rule against the use of alcoholic beverages. In such cases, the screening committee makes a report of its recommendations to the full membership for their consideration. The experience to date has shown that several members placed on probation have not had a drink in the following four month period. On the other hand, several members who were placed on probation drank again within a period of less than two weeks.

Money

Oxford House is built on the principle of self-help. When it comes to money matters, this simply means that any house must operate primarily from its rent receipts. There may be exceptions when a House is first getting started. After a few weeks or months, a new Oxford House should be able to pay all of its operating expenses out of its rental income.

Some expenses associated with an Oxford House are not controllable after a commitment has been made to begin the house. For example, the monthly rental payment or mortgage payment will be a fixed amount. In addition, utilities (electricity, gas, and water) will for the most part be fixed expenses. One area where expenses are controllable involves the purchase of food and supplies. All expenses, whether fixed or controllable, must be carefully watched so that any member at any time can know the

exact financial condition of the house. The President, the Treasurer, and the Comptroller all have a responsibility for making certain that accurate records are maintained showing the expenses and income of the house. To assist each house in their financial recordkeeping, the uniform recordkeeping procedures herein should be followed.

Checking Account - An Oxford House should establish a checking account as soon as possible. At least three officers of the house should be authorized to sign checks with two signatures required on each check in order for it to be valid. Any local bank will be more than willing to assist an Oxford House in establishing its checking account. Oxford House, Inc., will be ready and able to assist any charter member in providing the necessary documentation for the opening of a checking account. Each charter member has a separate checking account within the Oxford House system.

Record Books - Each Oxford House should maintain (1) a membership ledger; (2) a cash expenses journal; (3) a cash receipts journal; and (4) a general ledger. In addition, each member should be given a rent receipt when he pays his rent. The membership ledger is simply a list of names of the members, usually in a book form, with a member's name at the top of a page. Underneath the member's name, enter the date and amount of rent paid each time the member makes a payment. The rent receipt book can be used as a cross check to make sure that the membership ledger is up to date. The cash receipts journal should also show the amount of rent paid and by whom and for what period of time. This journal will also include a notation as to any other funds that Oxford House might receive, i.e., gifts, donations, or rebates.

The best record of expenses is generally the checkbook. Each check should show what the expense was for; the date the expense was made; and the amount of the expense. This information, along with any expenditures of petty cash should also be entered into the cash expenses journal. This provides a complete record of the expenses of an Oxford House and permits members to know where their money is going.

The general ledger should show the income received and the expenses made in a consolidated form. From the general ledger, one should be able to derive a weekly statement for posting on the house bulletin board. Such statement should show:

(1) cash on hand - $_____

(2) current liabilities - $____
(3) rents paid in advance - $____
(4) real cash position - $_____
(5) back rent due - $____

The "real cash position" category is an important figure for most Oxford Houses to watch. It is a figure arrived at by subtracting the amount of rent paid in advance from the cash on hand. This shows the true cash assets of an Oxford House at any point in time and serves as a reminder to those who are behind in their rent that they must pay if the house is to have a good current cash position.

The Treasurer and Comptroller are the two officers primarily responsible for assuring sound financial management for an Oxford House. Together with the President, they should continually check and cross-check the books so as to assure the accuracy of the true financial status of the house. At each weekly meeting, a report should be made to the full membership so that the membership can determine whether the rent is too high or too low and whether an individual has fallen too far behind in the payment of his rent.

Oxford House, Inc.

Oxford House, Inc., serves as an umbrella, non-profit corporation for all the Oxford Houses which have or will be given a charter. As a non-profit corporation, it, or any of its charter members, are considered tax exempt organizations* and as a general rule do not have to pay certain excise taxes. In addition, the corporation or any of its charters may receive contributions for which the donor can receive a tax deduction.

Oxford House, Inc., also serves as a central coordinating body for the various Oxford Houses. In this role, problems which are common to the houses can be resolved through this centralized organization. In addition, Oxford House, Inc., can sometimes arrange and monitor loans from financially-secure Oxford Houses to those in need of help. Above all, Oxford House, Inc., can share the experiences of successful Oxford Houses with new houses so as to assure their success.

Oxford House, Inc., has a Board of Directors made up exclusively of members of Oxford House. Each President of an Oxford House is mad a member of the Board of Directors during his term of office. In addition, there are three members of the Board who are members of Oxford House, but not officers in an Oxford House. The purpose of Oxford House, Inc., is to serve as a catalyst for the formation of as many Oxford Houses as are needed by recovering alcoholics in America.

*Application pending.

Oxford House

"A CONCEPT AND SYSTEM BASED ON SOUND TRADITIONS FOR RECOVERING ALCOHOLICS TO HELP THEMSELVES"

TRADITIONS -

adherence to principles and practices which apply the principles of Alcoholics Anonymous to the situation of recovering alcoholics living together in self-supported, democratically-run housing.